

INFRASTRUCTURAL ACQUISITION REIGNITING CHIEFTAINCY CONFLICTS IN CAMEROON: EXEMPLIFICATION WITH THE SANTA-AKUM CASE, 1965-1972

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ABSTRACT

The study discusses the role played by the acquisition of the Ngemba Native Authority Rest House in fanning or reigniting the Santa-Akum chieftaincy conflicts that rocked the area in the British colonial epoch. Though previous administrative and court judgments had laid the matter to rest, the acquisition of the rest house was interpreted by the Santa and supporters of Boma as a calculated attempt by Ndikum II of Akum to reassert his authority over the settlement. The intervention of the divisional administration and the quest for Ndikum not to use the structure for administrative purposes was rebuffed. Instead, it opened up old worries as Ndikum II claimed authority over Santa. However, the Ministry of Local Government reverting to the colonial administrative and court decisions, made it clear that the matter had been settled. Boma was the recognised authority (Quarter Head) of Santa and the Chief of Akum had to rule the settlement through him. Boma was also to be co-opted as member of the Akum Traditional Council. In spite of these administrative decisions, intransigence from sides has made it impossible for the effective implementations of these decisions over the years and clashes have continued unabated. The study recommends that effective implementation of previous decisions by the government and people of Santa and Akum is the only way forward and complaints from both parties should not be entertained by the administration.

Introduction

African communities have been perturbed by chieftaincy conflicts over the years especially in Cameroon where the authority of chiefs (Fons) is often contested by some of their subjects. Though such unfortunate incidents have caused untold sufferings and stifled the development of communities, these have continued unabated. This is true with the case of Satan and Akum where a chieftaincy conflict which started in the colonial era exists. ChiaBoma, whose authority was contested by FonNdikum I of Akum over Santa, had been appointed by the British colonial

authorities as tax collector in 1922. Though Akum and Santa were not geographically bounded, the Fon of Akum claimed authority over the land and people of Santa. He thus challenged the authority of Boma and his quest for autonomy and chieftainship.(see Tem, 2018 for details on the origin of the crisis). This move was not supported by the British colonial authorities as their interventions saw the reinstatement of Boma as legitimate authority in Santa and tax collector even though he had to pay homage to FonNdikum (Ngemba Native Court Law Suit No. 13/50(CS No.12310/4 of 25/4/50; (LGB. 17, Santa Affairs, 1967, 12; Letter no. B.3093/121 of 21st March 1955 from the DO to Boma).

Successive administrative and court decisions during the British colonial period therefore helped in maintaining peace between the two adversaries. Though the policies of Ndikum were continued by his predecessor who mounted the Stool in 1958, problems resurfaced and this time around it became more deadly when he purchased the Ngemba Native Authority Rest House in 1965. The purchase was interpreted by the Santa and supporters of Boma as a calculated attempt by Ndikum II to assert his authority and influence activities in that settlement directly. This therefore reignited the once moribund relations existing between these two settlements with more intensity. It took the intervention of the Ministry of Local Government in 1972 for the problem to be arrested though events have been punctuated by outbursts since then.

Santa and Akum are found in Santa Subdivision of the North West Region of Cameroon. It was formerly part of British Southern Cameroons and administratively fell under the jurisdiction of Bamenda Division. Upon independence and reunification of British Southern Cameroons and French Cameroon, Santa and Akum became part of the State of West Cameroon and were administered by the authorities of Mezam Division. Worthy to note is the fact that after reunification in 1961, Southern Cameroons took the appellation, West Cameroon and French Cameroon, East Cameroon.

Existing (Brief) Literature on the Causes of Chieftaincy Conflict and Justifications for the Study

According to Oduro-Awisi, (2003), chieftaincy institutions are often created as a result of the activities of courageous men who go in search of new settlements that are conducive for human

settlements (availability of water, access to food, shelter and protection from aggression). Once this is identified, the founder of the settlement becomes the chief of that community or new found land. In certain circumstances, someone who is respected and has won the confidence of the people might be designated the position of leader of the community. He and his family thus become the recognised leaders of the settlement forever.

However, non-respect of the laws of the land/taboo has led to detractions and disrespect of chiefs. In other words, conflicts and quests for the dethronement of chiefs occur when they disagree with their elders and disrespect the laws and customs/taboo of their people (Busia, 1951). Oduro-Awisi (2003) further posits that, wrangling usually occurs when the stool is vacant and there is rivalry among royals as each struggle to mount the Stool. He also opines, that improper management or misuse of properties and revenues that belongs to communities are undisputable or major sources of conflict. Tem (2017) does not disagree on this as he brings in another dimension, governance, as foundations of chieftaincy conflicts. Just like Busia (1951) he further insinuates that when chiefs do not respect the customs and traditions of their people, there is the risk of being disposed leading to conflict between his adherents and detractors. The absence of some chiefs from their palaces, as they go in search or quest for socio-economic opportunities, leaving the governance of their people in the hands of councils and regents have ignited chieftaincy conflicts. Their constant absence has often been seen as administrative ineffectiveness by detractors creating opportunities for them to usurp their authority and consequently squabbles ensue (Boafo-Arthur, 2006).

The emergence of a new elite class (educated, economic and political) after colonialism and their new found influence has intensified chieftaincy conflicts as they can challenge the choice of chiefs, fan tensions and finance skirmishes. Added to this, the presence of a superior authority, that is national governments or central authorities, have given rise to chieftaincy conflicts in the continent especially when such conflicts become politicised as politicians will either support chiefs who are sympathetic to them and the reverse is true (Eben, 2017; Dankwa, 2004; Tonah, 2012; Boafo-Arthur, 2006).

Colonial rule also set the bases for chieftaincy conflict in Africa (Brukum, 2007; Tonah, 2007; Addo-Fenning, 1990; Berry, 1998; Lentz 2006; Sackeyfio, 2008; and Sutton, 1984). Chiefs were

at the behest and call of colonial administrators who could appoint and dismiss any of them at will when their activities did not marry or were at variance with colonial policies. Even though the British colonial policy of Indirect Rule empowered chiefs over their subjects, their call to loyalty made some of them unpopular among their people especially when they acted arbitrarily to protect the interest of their masters. The outcome was resentment, disregard and the rise of separatist movements within their areas of jurisdiction and these were later manifested in chieftaincy conflicts. Besides, the appointment of those who were loyal to the British colonial authorities though not royals was not also accepted by the people for this was against the customs and traditional of their societies. The creation of chieftaincies in some societies in total disregard of the organizational and social structure of communities became one of the major sources of conflict as those appointed were contested by some members of their communities especially in future (Eben, 2017). Again, the role accorded chiefs and elders by the colonial regimes in the collection of taxes also ignited conflicts as some tax collectors usurped power and acted like chiefs in their areas of command (Tem, 2018).

The definiteness of the laws or principles governing succession has often ignited and abated chieftaincy conflicts. In some communities, the principles are not quite clear. Such ambiguities have laid the seeds of discords as sceptics and detractors may challenge the decision of kingmakers and authorities responsible for the designation of chiefs. Besides, kingmakers and the administration or government officials are often corrupted by some individuals into making wrong decisions which are contested and consequently feuds ensue (Eben 2017). In a similar vein, Tem (2013, 2016) argues that the failure of the administration in taking time honoured decisions remains one of the major sources and ingredients that fans chieftaincy conflicts. Things are further complicated by conflicting decisions between administrators and delay in implementing decisions delivered on matters related to chieftaincy conflict (Tem, 2013).

From the above analysis, it is clear that the causes of chieftaincy conflicts ruminates around the colonial factor (appointment of chiefs and tax collection roles accorded them by the colonial regimes), bad governance, disrespect of the laws and traditions of the people, failure of the administration in taking time honoured decisions and discrepancy on administrative decisions and delay in implementing court decisions, corruption in the selection and appointment of chiefs,

vacant stools and the absence of well-defined principles of succession and the role of new elite have been identified as causes of chieftaincy conflicts in Africa. However, infrastructural acquisition which is one of the major factors that accelerates chieftaincy conflicts has been placed at the footnotes of history especially in Cameroon where the phenomenon is conspicuous and remains a serious headache to the authorities. It is as a result of this that the study gives a different scholarly touch to the causes of this disputes that has been neglected in historiography related to the causes of chieftaincy conflict.

FonNdikum's Acquisition of the Native Authority Rest House Reigniting Old Squabbles

The rosy relations that existed between FonNdikum II of Akum and Boma of Santa came to a standstill in 1965. Relations were compounded by the purchase of the Ngemba Native Authority's Rest House by the Fon of Akum. Rightly or wrongly, Boma and his supporters believed that the Fon wanted to use it in ruling the people of Santa directly. Worthy to note is the fact that Boma had been suspected of off-rooting cypress trees planted round the Rest House by the Ndikum and this became another bone of contention and tensed relations between the supporters of the Fon and Boma ensued. In order to solve the problem, a meeting was organised on the 29th of August 1965 by the divisional administration and attended by the combatants and their supporters and elite of the division among which were; Honourable D. A. Attia, Anthony T. Ngunjoh, the Fon of Akum, Chia Boma, G. Tange, M. Chije, the S. S. Police, Bamenda, Tabi, Thomas Fomum, Simon Bango, B. Asala and L. G. N. Ngu (Secretary). Seven points were deliberated upon as proposed by the Senior Divisional Officer (SDO) included;

- 1) Fon of Akum is the recognised Fon of both Akum and Santa Akum and that this was undisputable.
- 2) Santa Akum is part of Akum and the question of creating a chief there is ruled out.
- 3) Chia Boma is one of the early settlers in Santa Akum, it would be better if he remained the Fon's lieutenant, quarter head and tax collector.
- 4) Chia Boma takes his rightful place in the Akum Traditional Council and by virtue of this be one of the Fon's advisers.

- 5) If accepted, the Fon should not have a Rest House in Santa-Akum for administrative purposes.
- 6) Withdrawal of all cases pending in Court for the sake of peace and unity.
- 7) Integration of Akum and Santa and Fon to exercise Authority through Boma in Santa. (Minutes of Round Table Conference on the Dispute between the Fon of Akum and Mr. Chia Bomaof Santa, held in the Senior Divisional Officer's Office on Sunday, August 29 1965 at 10:15 am).

The SDO insinuated that the escalation of the crises was caused by the purchase of the Akum Rest House by the Fon. Similar to the interpretations of Boma's supporters, he held that this was a deliberate and calculated attempt to rule the people of Santa directly without passing through the traditional channel (Boma). Hence, he proposed that the Rest House should be used for public purposes only but the Fon could also use it when visiting Santa like any other official. This view was strongly supported by Honourable Attia, Member of Parliament for the area. To him, there was no need for the Fon to have a Rest House in Santa as this was not the same case with all the other quarters in Akum. He, supported by a majority of those attending the meeting, wondered aloud why the chief was insisting on owning one in Akum. It was also noted that there was no need for the creation of a new chiefdom in Santa for this was against government policy and called on the combatants to embrace peace and unity. A fervent appeal was launched by A. N. Boma, who revisiting the memorandum of the Akum Welfare Union in relation to the matter stated;

... that the Head of Santa Akum for the purpose of this Council – (Akum Traditional Council) shall be recognised as a special High Nkum and shall attend the general body with eight elected members. Santa shall be represented in the executive council by the Head and three elected members.

Ndikum's Intransigence and Entrenchment of the Crisis

In spite of all these moves for the peaceful restoration of relations, the Fon questioned Boma's right to raise objections to his purchase of the Rest House. To him, this was legitimately sold to him by the Ngemba Native Authority and he had absolute authority over it. No one had the right to question his ownership of the Rest House, he argued. Such responses that were against the peaceful endeavours of the administration was frowned upon by the SDO who made it

categorically clear that the purchase of the Rest House was ill intentioned by the Fon who wanted to use it in exerting his influence in Santa. He held that if the chief thought his judgements was contrary, he could still retain the rest house and live there whenever he wishes.

However, the Fon instead raised other worries and further argued that since he took over power, Boma had been consulted on all matters concerning Santa. Within this period, he had instructed all Santa elements to table their worries and problems to him through him, he insinuated. But the inability of Boma to respect him resulted to his diversion from the original arrangements and wondered why the Rest House would become an object of disagreement and conflicts. He doubted whether it would have generated the same clamour for a revoke of the sale of the property if it was bought by a non-indigene or stranger. He went further to posit that other Fons owned Rest Houses in their areas of command or quarters like the case of Bansa but could not understand why his venture was an exception. To conclude, he accused Boma of slighting his authority by refusing to attend meetings organised by him to resolve differences between them.

These barneys was refuted by Boma who argued that the matter was fanned by the support and encouragements the Fon was giving to settlers from East Cameroon resulting to the disrespect and undermining of Boma's authority. This view was concurred by Chia Boma who could not understand why the Fon was allying with non-indigenes in meddling with the affairs of Akum and endangering the peace and unity that reigned in the Chieftdom (Ibid).¹ In spite of these confrontations in the meeting, the following resolutions were arrived;

- 1) That the Santa Rest House should not be used by the Fon for administrative purposes, but his ownership over the Rest House is certain and established and cannot be questioned.
- 2) That as the Ngemba Council has rescinded the sale, the Fon if he so wishes, to assert his legal rights, could contest the matter in court.
- 3) That the Fon should initiate a peace move to handle all issues here from in the Akum Traditional Council.

¹Boma and his supporters believed that the problem was fanned by settlers from East Cameroon who were mostly supporters of FonNdikum.

- 4) That Chia Boma should use his position as the Fon's lieutenant in Santa Akum to ensure that work be done on the premises of the Rest House and those trees off rooted, be replanted under his direction, and should from henceforth take charge of the Rest House for the Fon.
- 5) That the Akum Traditional Council shall be the final tribunal to bring lasting peace and unity, which is prerequisite to the economic and social development of Akum by the administration of Chia Boma as a member of the Council. (Ibid).

Reconciliation, A thorny Path for Boma and Ndikum

Based on the resolutions of the meeting of 29 August 1965, moves were made by Chia Boma in reconciling with the Fon. On the 14th, 17th, 21st and 26th of November 1965, he visited the palace for his installation as member of the Akum Traditional Council but his ambitions were frustrated by the Fon. Though Fon Ndikum accepted the drinks brought by Boma, he kept on postponing the exercise with the promise that a suitable date for meeting will be made. However, surprisingly, the Fon in a letter to Boma made it clear that there will be no peace between them. To him, Chia Boma was not ready for peace as he argued that R. S. Boma, supporter and relation of the former had refused arranging a meeting for discussion or settling the matter. As such, he was not ready for any discussion with his counterpart in relation to the conflict orated that this would only be possible after due consideration (Letter from the Fon of Akum to Mr Boma, 28/11/65; Notes of the SDO to the Ministry of Local of Government, 13/11/67).

This attitude of the fon was unprecedented and above all speculations as on the 14th of November, 1965, ten days before he made this declaration, the SDO had visited Akum and in a meeting with the contesting parties stressed that efforts be made by all in implementing the resolutions of the conference of 29 August 1965. He further reiterated that the position of Boma as quarter head of Akum should be respected by the Fon and thus called on him to use the former in that capacity. He re-echoed the fact that Boma remained the founder of Santa and tax collector for that area and this position was unchallengeable. The Minister of Local Government and Prime Minister of West Cameroon had visited Santa and also made it clear that the matter had been settled by the divisional administration and there was no need to revisit the problem. They again reverberated or echoed the idea that Boma be used as the quarter head and lieutenant of Santa.

The letter from the Fon to Boma cut the administration and Boma off guard as the former contended that the prescriptions of the administration had been ignored by his counterpart. He therefore called on the administration to do all in its powers to cause the Fon to respect the resolutions. Here is an extract of a petition he wrote to the administration in relation to this;

Firstly, in the interest of peace which the government emphasizes, I am appealing to you in the strongest place to enforce the decision of the Senior District Officer Bamenda ... immediately to avoid the consequences of provocation.

OR

Secondly, immediate steps must be taken to remove all administrative links between Akum and Santa Community.

OR

Thirdly, the declaration of an Inter-land Boundary Dispute with the Akum Chief may be another alternative to save the people of Santa from external domination by the new imperialist. I am prepared to pursue it. (Petition from Chia Boma through the SDO (for the attention of Mr. M. Sabum, through the Secretary of State for Local Government, Buea, West Cameroon, to the Prime Minister of West Cameroon, Prime Minister's Office, Buea, West Cameroon, 29th November 1965).

Boma further lamented why the Direct Taxation Ordinance was not respected by the Fon of Akum as he interfered in tax collection matters in Santa though he (Boma) remained the only tax collector recognised by the administration in Santa. Such outbursts were not healthy for the peace and unity of Santa and Akum.

In relation to the conference or meeting of the 29th of August 1965 and the continuance of clashes, a peace agreement which were curled from the August meeting was drafted by the Ministry of Local Government and had to be signed by the Fon and Boma. According to this deal the Fon had to undertake the following terms;

- 1) That the chief of Akum was the recognised chief of both Santa and Akum;
- 2) That Santa-Akum is part and parcel of Akum and the question of creating a chief there is ruled out;

- 3) That Mr. Chia Boma is one of the early settlers of Santa-Akum, it would be better if he were the chief of Akum's Lieutenant, the quarter head, and tax collector in Santa – the post being hereditary;
- 4) That Chia Boma should take his rightful place in the Akum Traditional Council and by virtue of this be one of the chief's advisers;
- 5) That the cases pending in the court between the chief and Mr, Chia Boma be withdrawn in the interest of peace, unity and progress of Akum;
- 6) That the Santa Rest House should not be used by the chief for administrative purposes;
- 7) That Chia Boma should use his position as the chief 's lieutenant in Santa Akum to ensure that work be done on the premise of the Rest House and tress off-rooted be replanted under his direction, and he should from hence take charge of the Rest House for the chief;
- 8) That Akum Traditional Council shall be the final Tribunal to bring lasting and unity, which is prerequisite to the economic and social development of Akum by the administration of Chia Boma as a member of the Council (Ref. No. F/656/31, From the Ministry of Local Government to the Senior Divisional Officer, Bamenda Division, "Chief of Akum and Mr, Chia Boma on Tax Collection at Santa", 6th April, 1966).

The Fon had to undertake these prescriptions as the peace terms read further;

I,, the chief of Akum and traditional overlord of the Akum village which includes Santa-Akum do in acceptance of the forgoing PEACE TERMS – 1 – 8 in appreciation of the fact that peace and tranquillity, order and progress which are the prerequisite for national unity and reconstruction must commence from the village level, in duty bound as the traditional ruler of Akum Village which in include Santa-Akum responsible to government for just and peaceful traditional administration of Akum, HEREBY UNDERTAKE to retain Mr, Chia Boma of Akum, resident in Santa-Akum, as my Quarter Head and Tax Collector for Santa-Akum in exactly the same way as other Quarter Heads and tax Collectors of other quarters of Akum Village and for that matter to administer the Santa Akum Quarter affairs through the said Mr, Chia Boma (Ibid).

He further had to undertake to prevent any provocation or actions from his people which may endanger this peace and that any offender, even himself inclusive had to be dealt with. From these peace terms, the Ministry of Local Government made it clear that Boma was the recognised quarter head of Santa-Akum and the Fon had to rule Santa-Akum through him.

Just like the chief, Chia Boma on his part had to accept the above peace term agreements. He also had to undertake the following prescriptions;

..... Hereby UNDERTAKE to remain the quarter head and tax collector of Santa-Akum village and be loyal, faithful and respectful to the chief of Akum and to the Akum Tradition in exactly the same peaceful manner as I had lived with the Chief's father, the late Chief of Akum (Ibid).

He was also called upon to undertake that he would prevent any provocation or acts that may lead to outbursts and insecurity in Akum and would be held liable if this happened just like the case of the Fon's undertaking.

However, the Fon remained adamant to the signing of such a treaty or agreement. This caused Boma to petition the Minister of Local Government and further insinuated that the Fon had defiled the SDO's attempts at resolving the conflict through the signing of the agreement. He justified this by arguing that in a meeting that held on the 19th of February 1966, the Fon out rightly rejected the signing of this document against the SDO's insistence.

FonNdikums's Disregard for the Peace Pact, Opening up new Wounds

The administration could not understand why the Fon of Akum could not respect these agreements reached previously though in his favour. The Ministry of Local Government thus instructed the SDO to make it clear to the Chief that his letter of February 1966 remains the valid instrument for the resolution of this conflict and must be adhered to. In a letter to the Fon of Akum, the SDO reminded him and his Traditional Council of the engagements arrived at on the 29th of August 1965 (Ref. No. DBA 51/81/41. Matter Concerning Mr, Chia Boma of Santa and Tax Collection from Santa, 5th May 1966).

Instead of adhering to these administrative decisions, they (Fon and Traditional Council) instead challenged the decision of the administration and Local Government Ministerial instructions. The Traditional Council, in a letter to the Prime Minister, categorically stated that they were not in favour of their Fon moving into any agreement with Boma. To them, the conflict was not between these two but Between Boma and the Traditional Council. They thus argued that it was against their customs and traditions for a Fon to enter into "terms of peace and agreement or

compromise” with his subject (Letter from Traditional Council Akum, through the Senior Divisional Officer Bamenda, to the Prime Minister of the Federated State of West Cameroon, DBA 51/81/41. Matter Concerning Mr, Chia Boma of Santa and Tax Collection from Santa, 5th May 1966).

They reminded the Prime Minister that Mr. Boma was recalcitrant and contemptuous as he had been imprisoned for two months in 1954 before signing the peace accord with the late Fon and Traditional Council of Akum on the 31st of August 1954. The Traditional Council accused him of defiling the 1954 accord and would not understand why the SDO was forcing them to implement the 1965 peace agreements. They stated clearly that they will only do so if the 1954 agreements were enforced. They further argued that, by declaring himself Chief of Santa, Mr Chia Boma had defiled this agreement and accused the administration of partiality. They wondered whether the administration was weak or ignorant of this deal.

To drive home their arguments against the 1965 agreement, they opened up old wounds and opined that Boma was not the first settler in Santa and there was nothing in native law and custom indicating that once a man was the founder of a settlement, he was automatically the quarter head or tax collector. They also held that the pressure from the administration for them to include Boma as a member of the Traditional Council was not feasible. This was because membership was based on inheritance and Boma’s father was never a member in that institution. They unequivocally stated that it was impossible for them to recognise Boma as quarter head or tax collector. In relation to the withdrawal of the case from court, they argued further that the Traditional Council or Fon had no problem with Boma. They reiterated that Boma was involved in a criminal activity and this was under police investigation. Sarcastically, they concluded that “... if the Bamenda Public Administration likes, it can condole crime and set the suspect free” (Ibid).

Again, they disagreed on the denial of their Fon in using the Rest House. To them, it was the Fons’s property and no one had absolute authority over it except him. They interpreted the refusal for him to use the structure in whatever manner he wanted as tacitly giving Boma right over Santa as his usage will be tantamount to an infringement on Boma’s chiefdom. Also, they

accused the administration of stalling proceedings against Boma in the court of law in relation to the off-rooting of the trees planted around the Rest House by the Fonand instead demanding for their replanting. They concluded that government's insinuation that peace could not be achieved if Boma was not included as member of the traditional Council was not true. Peace and stability could only come with the enforcement of the 1954 agreement (Ibid).

However, these arguments were thwarted by the Ministry of Local Government which maintained that the peace pact/deal prepared for both chief Ndikum and Boma was the final decision of the government. Even though this calmed down tempers and clashes minimised, problems were cropped up again after 1972, this time around not catalysed the issue of the Rest House.

Conclusion

The study set put to examine the role infrastructure played in embedding the Sant-Akum chieftaincy crisis. It argued that the purchase of the Ngemba Native Authority Rest House in Santa by the Chief of Akum intensified the moribund relations that existed between the Akum and Santa. This move was interpreted by Boma and his supporters as a deliberate or calculated attempt by the Chief to exert his influence and rule Santa-Akum contrary to previous administrative agreements. The acquisition of the rest house intensified the hatred and division that already existed between the adversaries and their supporters. Tensed relations between these opponents did not leave the divisional administration and West Cameroon government indifferent as efforts were made at arresting the matter. Based on existing colonial judgements and agreements they concluded among other resolutions that Boma remained the unchallengeable quarter head of Santa and had to be recognised by the Chief as such and used in the administration of that area. Boma in turn had to accept the over lordship of the Fon of Akuma over Santa and be co-opted as member of the Akum Traditional Council. On the issue of the rest house, this was not to be used by the Chief for administrative purposes. However, the efforts of the administration were frowned upon by the Fon and Traditional Council of Akum as they rejected these peace terms and problems intensified. In spite of all these, the administration was resolute on its decisions and firmly maintained that previous administrative and court decisions

were unchangeable and would not entertain any matter on the problem. Though constant outbursts have been recorded in the area since 1972, the paper concludes that for there to be real peace, the administration should be firm on its previous decisions and avoid entertaining complaints from the people.

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